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## Barrow on Liberal Education and Schooling.

### Introduction

Robin Barrow has committed himself, over the years, to an explanation and defence of a particular vision of liberal education which owes much to the earlier writings on Education of R.S. Peters. Central to this defence has been a sharp distinction between Education and Schooling. However, just as Peters was, in his later work, concerned to situate liberal education within a broader field of legitimate educational concern, so it should be possible to do the same with Barrow's work on liberal education by questioning the impermeability of the Education/Schooling distinction, thus opening up a broader conception of liberal education that at the same time remains largely true to Barrow's vision.

### *A Categorical concept of education:*

R.S. Peters was primarily concerned to develop a *categorical* account of education, that is, an account of education as a human institution irrespective of any particular instantiation in a specific time or place. In his earlier writings on this subject he maintained that such an account would be fairly detailed ('thick' in the jargon), but gradually realised that any attempt to make it too detailed would lead to a partial or complete assimilation of the categorical concept to a particular interpretation and to the filling out of that concept specific to a time and place rather than to a context free account. The assimilation of the concept of education to particular conceptions of it would, while providing detail, also vitiate the possibility of providing a philosophically credible universal account of a fundamental human institution. This must be an ever present danger for anyone attempting such an exercise, as every philosopher stands within a particular education tradition from which it is difficult to completely detach oneself, even when attempting comprehensive philosophical detachment.

In his considered later view, such a categorical conception involved preparing young people for life, it had to involve learning and/or some form of upbringing or development and the preparation had to be for something regarded as worthwhile (Peters 1982). I agree with Peters' late account of the categorical concept except for one crucial point that he leaves out, although arguably it is implicit in what he says about the contestability of educational concepts. The omission is that the preparation has to be regarded as worthwhile *for someone*

by *someone*. When the someone in question is not the same, then the possibility can arise that what is regarded as worthwhile by *Someone A* for themselves is not regarded as worthwhile by *Someone A* for *Someone B*. It may thus be the case that A thinks that B (and his like) should have an education which is substantially *different* than the one offered to A (and his like). As a corollary, a B-type education would not be worthwhile for an A-type person. This is one important way in which one could have a bad (inappropriate) education. Such views about different educational experiences for different types of people might arise for a number of reasons:

- 1] B is a slave and A is a member of the ruling slave-owning group.
- 2] As above, but B is a helot or member of the working or peasant class and A is a landowner or capitalist.
- 3] B has been found, by some accepted procedure, to be incapable of benefiting from certain kinds of education that requires a particular kind and degree of 'intelligence'. A, on the other hand, can benefit from these kinds of education.
- 4] B belongs to an inferior racial or sexual grouping to A and so to give him and his like an A-type education would be disruptive to the good ordering of society.
- 5] B has different interests, abilities and talents to A and would personally benefit from an education different in kind to that of A.

Finally, there is also the not insignificant case whereby the members of A's group cannot themselves agree *either* on what is a worthwhile life for A-type people *or* what is a worthwhile preparation for a life for A-type people, or maybe they disagree about both.

The list of possibilities is not exhaustive. An important point worth noting is that both the believers in one or more of 1] – 5] and those who believe that 1] – 5] provide no grounds for providing a distinct type of education for A and B, may believe that their views are universal, applying to all kinds of human situation, rather than just the particular society in which the debate about kinds of education is taking place. But the fact that A regards his views as universally true does not mean that those views are universally true. In fact, anyone attempting to set out even a moderately detailed categorial account of education needs to take particular care to ensure that they do not claim universality for features of education present in their own societies that they find especially attractive, without ensuring that they are indeed universal features.

It is not at all difficult to see how a categorial concept of education may be instantiated in different (often mutually incompatible) *conceptions*. A *conception* of education is a particular interpretation of the categorial concept. Contestation about different conceptions arises primarily because different groups have different interpretations about what is worthwhile for themselves and secondarily because some groups may consider a certain form of education suitable for another group and that group might disagree with that view.

### *Values, Aims and Education.*

In order to get clearer about this, we need to look more closely at the idea of preparation for a worthwhile life. Most obviously, perhaps, a worthwhile life (for a society, for a group or for an individual) is underpinned by *values*. Values are the fundamental ethical commitments of individuals, societies and groups. They are, for example, beliefs about rights, equality and justice, together with religious beliefs on which the former often depend. Linked to values are empirical, quasi-empirical and metaphysical beliefs about the way the world is ordered, about human ability and its distribution, and about the way in which society should be ordered (Haldane, 1989). It seems indubitably to be the case that people do not all espouse the same values concerning justice, equality and so on, let alone about these broader religious, empirical and metaphysical issues which underpin the way in which education is undertaken.

That being the case, and if education is both an expression of values held and an attempt to perpetuate those values, together with the other beliefs that support and are supported by those values, it is inevitable that different conceptions of education will arise. Very often these different conceptions will take the form of emphasis or weighting of different aspects of education: liberal, vocational or civic. They need not, however, be mutually exclusive.

But they may also take the form of recommendations of rigid separation of different kinds of education for different kinds of people, as in Plato's *Republic*, for example.

“Therefore inasmuch as you are all related to one another, although all your children will generally resemble their parents, yet sometimes a golden parent will produce a silver child, and a silver parent a golden child, and so on, each producing any.” (Plato 1950, p.114).

It does not follow either that an individual child will respond to the type of education that is appropriate for him or her. Careful selection and rigorous monitoring in different streams of education will be necessary to ensure that the right type of child receives the right type of education for their preferred station in life (preferred that is, by the Guardians of the *polis*).

In some cases the values are underpinned by a speculative moral psychology that dictates a clear curricular and pedagogic route to the desired end of a worthwhile life. The moral psychology that lies behind Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) is a good case in point. The goal of a society governed as a direct democracy by individuals who regard themselves as free, equal and undominated by anyone else, is thought to be only obtainable by educating people in such a way that they are never exposed to explicit normative pressure (Dent 1988; Winch 1996). One may well hold to Rousseau's political values but not subscribe to his moral psychology and hence to his curricular and pedagogic prescriptions, on the grounds that the latter are not empirically sustainable but are nothing more than speculations. Later followers of Rousseau, most notably perhaps, Piaget and his followers, have sought to provide some empirical justification for his views, albeit working within a metaphysics of human development that Rousseau first set out. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of Piagetian developmentalism is that it attempts to universalize data gathered in very specific circumstances (Vygotsky 1962; Donaldson 1978). Incidentally Rousseau's speculative moral psychology led him to the view (in contrast to Plato's in the Republic) that women should have radically different educations to those enjoyed by men, a view which he held to be universally valid, but one which would, in our society, be taken to be universally *invalid*.

What is the logical relationship between values on the one hand and associated beliefs about types of people and their educability on the other? One interesting consequence of recognizing a categorial concept of education is that it implies that education is an intentional activity, even if not always an explicitly intentional activity. A preparation for life involves having an end in mind (a worthwhile life) and a viable strategy for preparing to achieve it (an educational process). To institute the latter, the former must be rendered in some form which makes a viable strategy possible. This need not be explicit, it may be conceived of as an implicit goal shared by all who are concerned with the enterprise of education, without ever having to be articulated or debated. At the other extreme it may be very explicit and emerge after wide-ranging debate. Values embodied in goals which are susceptible of strategic

implementation are the *aims* of education, whether they be explicit or implicit, lacking in generality or detailed.

Furthermore, it is evident that, if aims express values and if those values are subject to intra- or inter- societal variation then they themselves will vary. The very possibility of such variation leads to the *contestability* of educational aims and the fact that they are frequently subject to debate and disagreement leads to the fact of their actually being *contested*. One might argue that there is no serious dispute about values, that we all share the same basic ideals about justice, rights, human worth and dignity etc. and that therefore there is no serious dispute about educational aims (cf. Carr 2010).<sup>1</sup> However, such a move only gains purchase by a covert shift from consideration of education as a universal phenomenon to a consideration of its instantiation in the here and now. Considered from a universal perspective it is evident that there has been and continues to be enormous variation in the values that societies hold concerning such issues as the nature of justice, of rights and what constitutes a worthwhile life and for whom. One might reply that something like the reaction of the Good Samaritan to the injured traveler exhibits a universal reaction to human distress and thus an exemplification of a universal human code (Pinzauti 2012). Even if this philosophically controversial thesis were admitted, it would not alter the fact that societies have always and continue to organize themselves in ways which exhibit massive diversity in value orientation. The fact that there is often some convergence due to the successful political activity of disadvantaged groups that have succeeded in getting some of their own values implemented does not count against this point (cf Vico 1968 for an account of class struggle in antiquity that leads to this kind of outcome).

Even when morality is based on a universalist approach, such as within the natural law tradition followed by Hobbes, or through its development via the categorical imperative of Kant, it is far from clear that there is going to be convergence on what such a high level principle actually means in terms of moral conduct and legislation, and hence for education. For example, Hobbes thought that the derivatives of the moral law should be taught by rote to ensure right conduct and he also thought that proselytisation was against the Law of God. The implications of this position for religious education are pretty obvious. Notoriously as well,

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<sup>1</sup> There is some evidence that Carr has changed his views on this issue and that they are now closer to, if by no means identical with, the one's espoused in this article.

Kant's attempts to derive maxims from the categorical imperative have met with considerable scepticism (see Ward 1974, for example).

The final point worth making about the reality of contestability concerns class conflict. Although we usually associate the idea that class conflict is the motor of history with Marx, the idea was already well developed in the work of Giambattista Vico in the early Eighteenth Century (Vico 1968), who traces the effects on our culture of class conflict from the dawn of civilization. Class stratification has obvious and conflicting effects on our views as to what kind of education is good for whom and from whose point of view. Successful class conflict by the subordinate classes can change the ways in which education is implemented. Even those who advocate for educational provision in favour of the subordinate classes may have different views as to what benefits them most. Thus it is arguable that part of the popularity of Italian fascism amongst the working class in the early 1920s may have rested on their advocacy of technical education (Murphy 2002, pp.69-70), while their left-wing opponents were adamant in their demand for a classical education for the proletariat and in their view that vocational education for the masses was a means of keeping them in a subordinate position (Gramsci 1975).

#### *Aims and the Curriculum.*

However, contestability goes beyond this. The categorical concept of education allows the derivation of categorial subconcepts. We have already noted the logical dependency of educational aims on values (among other kinds of beliefs), but we can go further. Any rational attempt to put a set of educational aims into effect will require a more detailed instantiation in terms of content (Barrow, (1976) helpfully defines the curriculum as prescribed content) and hence as a cumulative programme of knowledge, know-how, character formation and understanding that is to be developed in order to realize educational aims. What though, given the logical subordination of the curriculum to aims, should be the place of accumulated systematic knowledge (disciplines), grouped for pedagogical purposes, otherwise known as *subjects* into which the curriculum has, in the centuries of formal schooling, been organized. One view is that the subjects provide an indispensable resource for any curriculum and must be, in some form and in some degree, incorporated into it. Another view, to be found in the work of John White, is that an aims-led curriculum means that there can be no preconception in favour of subjects, and that their adoption must be

contingent on whether or not they best satisfy the educational aims that a society or group has decided upon (cf. White 2007). There seem to be at least two important issues in play in this dispute. The first is a practical one concerning the usefulness of the subjects as curricular resources and whether it is worthwhile or even practicable to reorganize knowledge to suit specific aims. The second is a philosophical issue and concerns whether or not acceptance of the general principle of the priority of aims entails that the position of subjects is entirely subordinate to aims-fulfillment. This cannot be assumed, I would argue, without a view as to whether it is wise to dispense with the resources offered by the accumulated wisdom represented by the subjects. So on this view, an aims-led curriculum does not directly entail the subordination of subjects, but the subjects themselves represent a side-constraint on curriculum design.

There is however, a third issue of contestation worth mentioning. When advocates of an aims-led curriculum do, as White often does, make specific curricular recommendations that imply a subordinate or truncated role for certain subjects, then one is entitled to ask whether or not the general logical point about the relationship between aims and curriculum has been subtly transformed into an argument from the adoption of aims in general to the adoption of certain specific aims (such as autonomy) in certain presumed social conditions (e.g. for White, the impending omnipresence of a leisured society in the developed world— see White, 1997) and hence to highly specific curricular decisions concerning the role of the subjects. While there is nothing philosophically suspect about presenting an argument from philosophical premises concerning particular aims to philosophical conclusions about prescribed content, there is something philosophically suspect about confusing a categorical point about the logical structure of the conceptual field of education with specific advocacy of a contestable view about particular aims and their relationship with the subjects.

### *Pedagogy.*

A different kind of confusion occurs in relation to pedagogy. Carr, for example, acknowledges that there is wide-ranging and profound disagreement on ethically valid pedagogies (eg op.cit. 2010 p. 101) but denies that their existence amounts to contestability in the sense described above. Observing, quite rightly, that on many occasions such conflicts about rival pedagogies are resolved in terms of a practical solution which commands at least the conditional assent of all parties, he concludes, wrongly, that this fact invalidates the



contestability thesis (ibid. p.102). Even allowing for the case (favourable to his point of view) that such conflicts are nearly always resolvable, the fact that they are does not necessarily involve convergence on value orientation (although, in some cases it may) but rather a compromise on the extent to which the implementation of conflicting value stances may be resolvable in a pedagogically and ethically viable *modus vivendi*. It is unlikely, for example, that a Rousseauvian who holds that any overt imposition of an adult will on a child is corrupting, can be brought to acknowledge any alignment of values on pedagogical matters with a traditionalist who believes that pedagogy necessitates the overt introduction of a child into a normative order in which an authoritative teacher is the prime pedagogical mover. A *modus vivendi* concerning the implementation of values is not a convergence on the values themselves, but a convergence on the extent to which and manner in which practices can be constructed which represent partial implementations of those conflicting values in ways acceptable to the parties that find themselves in disagreement. Indeed, we cannot expect that any significant compromise can be obtained on values that constitute important elements of a person's stance towards the world and even of their personal identity in a broad sense of that term.

#### *Liberal Education in a Broad Sense and its Relationship to Vocational Education.*

How do these considerations bear on the question of whether liberal education occupies a privileged place in the educational pantheon, or indeed, whether it is (categorially speaking) the only practice that is worthy of the appellation 'education'? A positive answer to this question, held by Barrow, Carr and the earlier and middle Peters, still commands considerable although by no means universal consent. A common approach by those who take this view is to separate some worthwhile experiences of preparation for life which do not satisfy liberal aims from those that do and call the former 'schooling' rather than 'educational' practices (eg. Barrow 1981). It is, however, implicit in what has been said before that such practices that involve learning, instruction, etc. as a preparation for a worthwhile aspect of life, fall squarely within the categorial educational concept, rather than under any contingent contestable conception (cf. Gingell 2010). That being so it can be asked first, in what sense are non-liberal forms of education actually educational and secondly, to what extent are liberal forms of education compatible with other forms, such as vocational education?

Here it is possible to give a quite detailed and positive answer. Many countries which do attempt to articulate aims for their public education systems try to do so in a way that takes account of at least some of the main dimensions of a worthwhile life in the kinds of societies that we live in. Broadly speaking, countries like France and Germany (but not the UK) distinguish between preparation that develops a person as a unique individual, that develops a person as an economically productive member of society and that develops a person as a citizen. These are not, of course, an exhaustive account of the dimensions of a worthwhile human life. Many would, for example, emphasise the domestic and the religious spheres of life and lament the fact that they do not receive sufficient attention in modern public education systems. But given that these three dimensions are recognized in the aims of such systems, the question (with both conceptual and practical dimensions) arises as to what extent can they be jointly pursued, and in such a way that they are educational.

My strategy for exploring this question will be to take a broad liberal conception of education as a point of reference and to ask to what extent the programme of such a conception has strong analogues in the other conceptions, particularly in that of vocational education. I hope, in this way, to dispel the idea that one has to change the terms of the debate in order to gain a foothold of understanding for vocational conceptions of education. In fact, what one encounters in developed forms of liberal education has very clear analogues in developed forms of vocational education and this allows us to appreciate their close similarities. These similarities arise because the values and aims that underpin both vocational and liberal education in modern European societies are not that dissimilar, and therefore compromises concerning values in the implementation of either are not too drastic. This is possible because, although such societies do have a quite clear class stratification, they do not have the near impermeable kind of class structure that is to be found in more traditional societies, nor indeed the more informal but nevertheless deep-seated and quasi-antagonistic kind of class relationships to be found in England.

There are two aspects to traditional liberal education which should be distinguished, even when they are closely related to each other. The first, perhaps most emphasized by writers like Peters, Hirst and, indeed, Barrow, is that of inculcation into the high culture of the civilization which the young person being educated has inherited. And, as Gingell and Brandon (2001) pointed out, this does not necessarily have elitist implications, nor does it imply that all and only what has traditionally been thought to belong to high culture should

belong to it. The key point is whether or not the selection that comprises the curriculum is ‘the best that has been thought and said’. Liberal academic education in itself does not presuppose the kind of division between high culture and an ersatz popular culture for those of more feeble educational potential of the kind proposed by, for example, G.H. Bantock (1971), who in effect adopts view 3] above as a selection principle for different kinds of education for different kinds of people.

The second element is the development of character – not just in the sense of moral education but also as the development of an ability to exercise independent thought and judgment. It is also now commonplace for many writers in the tradition of liberal education to emphasise the development of *autonomy* or the ability to chart a course in life, as the primary educational aim for individuals. Not necessarily because the exercise of autonomy is always and everywhere the only valuable state of an adult human, but because, in the kinds of societies in which we live (and these include both liberal market and more socialist arrangements) we are expected to and cannot avoid exercising autonomy (Raz 1986 Ch.14).

A point often overlooked but well worth dwelling on, concerns the fact that, unlike the time when liberal education was first developed in classical Greece and even later in the work of such enlightenment thinkers as Rousseau, in contemporary times the great majority of the population subject to mass compulsory education is destined to work for a living and this includes women as well as men, as the ‘living wage’ which would support a family practically no longer exists except for the most wealthy. Thus the autonomous person is, perforce, one who very likely will spend most of his or her adult life either employed or self-employed. Few will enjoy the privileged life of a *rentier*.

This has had consequences which philosophers of education have not devoted enough time and attention to. Even those enjoying a ‘classical’ liberal education will expect to have to work for their living. The ‘character’ side of education will unavoidably concern itself with virtues aligned with those of a society in which most members will be involved in paid employment. This alters the terms of debate for those exploring the relationship between liberal and vocational education and affects the kind of liberal education that is on offer.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> R.S.Peters (1981) Ch.3 ‘Democratic Values and Educational Aims’ in *Essays on Educators*, London, Routledge. White’s (1997) *Education and the End of Work* can be seen as an attempt to reinstate the conception of education for a world without work in a contemporary setting.

One important way in which this socio-economic ‘elephant in the room’ has an impact on what we understand by liberal education is first that both the cultural and character elements of such an education become oriented, whether deliberately or not, to preparation for a world in which paid employment is a central part of the educatee’s future life. The growing role of higher education as the final phase in liberal education (as well as in professional education of various kinds) means that the subject or subjects in which one becomes a relative expert at tertiary level become critical for one’s employment prospects.

This happens in two ways. First through the fact that university education acts as a kind of filter on the labour market. The subject that one studies is regarded either as a marker of intellect or character. The institution and class of degree that one has obtained is also regarded as such a marker. In both these cases one’s certificated education acts as a *positional filter* in the labour market, whether or not one’s education has prepared one for a specific role in employment. The second way is connected with the fact that, to a greater or lesser degree, the subject that one studies at university is part of the technical knowledge that one needs to carry out a particular role in employment. In practice these are often difficult elements to disentangle from one another, but taken together they provide a powerful alignment of liberal education with the exigencies of employment. In many cases the connection with the labour market is made through further postgraduate professional education which allows the individual to tailor his subject expertise to the needs of particular employment roles.

### *Liberal and Vocational Education.*

These considerations provide good reason to suppose that the aims of vocational and liberal education in our kind of society need not be as distinct as is commonly supposed. But in order to establish this point more securely it is important to lay to rest one particular canard that has been allowed to fly for far too long. This is the misidentification of vocational education with vocational training, a misidentification which R.S. Peters had already drawn attention to thirty years ago (Peters 1982, Ch.3). Training, the inculcation of the ability to perform confident and accurate routines associated with a task, plays a necessary role in all forms of education (see Wittgenstein, 1951; Ryle, 1949, for an account of the importance of training in learning). And although there is such a thing as vocational training, it is not to be identified with vocational education. Vocational training involves inculcation of the ability to

perform tasks connected with employment. Vocational education is concerned with preparing an individual to operate within a certain employment context, such as a profession or other kind of occupation and although it will undoubtedly involve episodes of training, will by no means be exhausted by them any more than liberal education is exhausted by learning times tables or the alphabet.

It is, of course unreasonable for employers to expect that an educated person present themselves at their place of work ready to do a job without further preparation. But is it unreasonable for an employer to expect that educated people acquire some of the personal and social characteristics necessary to be effective employees? One concept that keeps getting in the way in the Anglo-American-Australian context is that of *skill*. Employers complain that university and school graduates lack the skills necessary for employability, while universities and schools retort (with some justice) that it is not their job to provide future workers with the skills necessary for employment. However, there are some personal characteristics and kinds of ability that it is, arguably, the responsibility of liberal educators to develop, at least to a certain degree, and these characteristics and abilities are necessary to becoming an effective and responsible employee as well as an autonomous individual. Robin Barrow has himself argued (Barrow 1987) that the term ‘skill’ is manifestly inadequate as a label for many kinds of important and valuable kinds of practical ability and should not be used for them.

Unfortunately, English lacks a ready-to-hand term that covers these abilities and it is therefore regrettable but perhaps not surprising, that ‘skill’ gets pressed into all kinds of inappropriate and misleading services. However, we are not bereft of conceptual resources for identifying and describing these kinds of abilities. We owe to Gilbert Ryle (1979, Ch.1) in particular the concept of an ‘adverbial verb’ or type of action which does not necessarily have one type of manifestation, but is manifested differently according to different contexts and purposes. A subset of these is particularly important to our enquiry – those that are in the context of German vocational education called ‘Fähigkeiten’ (as opposed to ‘Fertigkeiten’ or skills). They include such abilities as being able to plan, co-ordinate, control, communicate, co-operate, negotiate and evaluate, primarily in the context of work. It is characteristic of these abilities that, although they may depend on the exercise of skills for their realization, they are not to be identified with any particular skill or set of skills. The possession of ‘planning skills’ such as being able to draw a diagram or describe a putative course of action

is not the same ability as the ability to plan, although it may, in certain circumstances, be a necessary component of such an ability. To be able to plan, to co-operate or to evaluate requires not just the possession of certain skills, but the seriousness, attention and commitment that results in planning, co-operation or evaluation actually being capable taking place, rather than motions of, say, planning just being gone through. In other words, such abilities, to be truly exercised, need to draw on certain personal characteristics and, dare one say it, *virtues*.

Thus in some respects, good quality vocational education is very well equipped to develop one of the prized goods of education, namely character. This is a theme common in the literature of the German speaking countries: Goethe's Wilhelm Meister and Keller's Heinrich Lee are good examples of *Bildungsroman* characters who develop and discover themselves through sustained occupational engagement as novices struggling to achieve a sense of what is excellent in the occupation and how they measure up to those standards. This is not to say that school-based education is incapable of providing such goods, but the artificial character of schools, lauded by, for example Oakeshott (see Fuller, 1976), becomes an obstacle in some respects as the German vocational educator Kerschensteiner (1930) recognized. If the development of character is taken to be a central aim of education (*Erziehung* rather than *Bildung* in the German tradition), then schools' efforts to do so cannot be dismissed as 'schooling' rather than 'education' unless one has already taken a firm position on the educative nature of some kinds of learning to the detriment of others. It is notable that in this respect Barrow follows the earlier Peters rather than the later, who became much more aware of the possibilities of varieties of education that engaged fully with the practical and even with the vocational spheres of life.

Surely though, a conservative form of liberal education, conceived of as *cultural initiation* cannot be managed through vocational education, however sophisticated? Vocational education is not preparation for child or adolescent labour; it concerns preparation for adult life, primarily but not exclusively in the medium of employment and must, therefore, make use of the resources of liberal education as a preliminary, building on and even extending the liberally educated capacities of the student by doing so. We have already noted the growing role of specialization within liberal education and the somewhat porous boundaries between an achieved education as a purely personal good, as a positional good and as an instrumental good in the labour market.

Just as in our society liberal education conceived of as cultural initiation has more than a purely personal aim, but fits individuals for employment and citizenship, so good quality vocational education has significant liberal and civic aspects. Vocational education which aims to prepare young people for technically complex work requiring high levels of independence and co-ordination cannot but rely on a firm liberal educational footing in which the traditional secondary school subjects figure very strongly. Decent levels of literacy and numeracy will be an absolute prerequisite and in many occupations a good scientific education will also be important. Many ‘high skill’ occupations depend on the application of systematic, often scientific, knowledge to practice, not just in the sense of maxims to be applied in the workplace, but as bodies of knowledge that can be interrogated as part of professional judgment. But, more than this, it is arguable that the acquisition of a broad ‘cultural literacy’ (Hirsch 1987) is important to give an employee of whom independence and intelligence of action is expected, a broad conceptual and contextual understanding of the society in which he is living in order that he can make independent professional judgements for the firm he works for. Needless to say, an employee who is expected to obey orders and to carry out narrow routines will not need such attributes in order to carry out their job. For such employees, vocational training will be adequate.

I mentioned earlier that although there can be variation in what kind of education is suitable for what kind of person, in societies that are relatively equal and cohesive, that variation can be rendered into conceptions which bear quite a close resemblance to each other. A particularly important issue is that of the extent to which liberal education should continue to be a significant element of vocational education. I have already suggested that, in some respects, the *Erziehung* element in vocational education can relatively easily be realized, perhaps to a greater extent than in some forms of liberal education. But it can be argued that a continuing liberal element in vocational education also has an important liberal as well as vocational role. A good case has been made out that the traditional liberal curriculum embodies ‘powerful knowledge’ (see some of the contributions in Lauder et al 2012 and in particular the contribution by Muller). It is not just that the traditional liberal subjects continue to be very prestigious and confer an enhanced social status on those who have a good acquaintance with them, it is also that they are, arguably, necessary for one to have influence in one’s own society. Without good numeracy, literacy, a sure grasp of history, geography and science, not to mention acquaintance with languages and the arts, it is difficult

to get a decent grip on the concerns of the dominant sections of society whose thought-world tends to be formed through an intensive version of precisely such an education.

Such an education, extended into one's late adolescence and early adulthood, allows one to develop the kind of informed desires (Winch 2005, Ch.7) that are an important component of the range of choices for a worthwhile life that an educated person might reasonably be expected to make. This is true for the choices one might make for one's occupation as well as for other aspects of one's life. It also helps to create a firm grounding for continuing personal education. In this respect a continuing subject-based and liberal strand within vocational education is a prerequisite of the Humboldtian conception of *allgemeine Menschenbildung* or general human education, which provides for the condition of continuing development of individuality, while at the same time allowing an individual to play a part within established social roles (Benner, 2003). Last, but not least, it has an important *civic* function. In order to engage with political, social and economic élites on their own terms, a good acquaintance with the high culture that constitutes their principal medium of thought is important for the sustaining of an informed and active citizenry which aspires to engage with the direction of their own society. This point remains the case whatever explicit provision for civic education is made within vocational education programmes.

It is sometimes argued that the presence of academic subjects in vocational education is not necessary for vocational purposes and that apprentices and students should rather be able to access the knowledge that they need in order to carry out specific vocational projects and tasks. Rather than being introduced to subjects, it is argued, students should be able to access *Lernfelder* or fields of learning which will enable them to glean the knowledge necessary to complete the work that they are undertaking. While *Lernfelder* may indeed be able to do this, it is difficult to maintain at the same time that they will continue to provide the powerful knowledge needed to provide access to civic activity and to their further personal development. It is true that the *Lernfelder* are concerned with the specifically technically knowledge required to practice within an occupation, rather than the broader knowledge associated with civic and personal development. However, the disciplines associated with technical competence, such as mechanics or economics, are also part of the extended liberal education of someone preparing for work, just as they are for the economics graduate wishing to go into banking or the engineering graduate wishing to become an engineer. It is desirable,



therefore, that subjects continue to be given an important role in the technical aspects of vocational education.

### *Conclusion.*

It has been argued against those who argue against the ‘contestability’ of educational concepts that there is no one preferred form of education. However, in developed Western societies with a broadly classless temper, the provision of different educational routes to individuals with different interests and aspirations need not involve the provision of routes that do not share significant similarities. Indeed, it is argued that the character developing aspects of European type apprenticeship is a very effective vehicle for achieving some important liberal aims, while the continuation of subject-based academic education is an crucial component of a vocational education worthy of the name. Barrow’s vision of liberal education not only survives the promotion of such diverse routes but positively requires a broad education up to and including lower secondary education.

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